CULTURAL GUIDE TO KENYA

Transition Center
George P. Shultz National
Foreign Affairs Training Center
Foreign Service Institute
U.S. Department of State

CULTURAL GUIDE TO KENYA

Prepared for the

OVERSEAS BRIEFING CENTER
FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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on the basis of interviews, and on
published and unpublished materials

Updated 1998, School of Professional and Area Studies,
Foreign Service Institute

Updated 2005, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy Nairobi

The kind professional assistance of the following people who contributed to the original culture guide is deeply appreciated: Evanson K. Njoroge, Cicely J. Noronha, Lucy G. Onono, James C. Armstrong, Helen Armstrong, Coralie J. Turbitt, Richard W. Kraemer, Celia Nyamweru, Beverly Yett, and the many others who graciously granted interviews to the author.

The assistance of the following reviewers is appreciated:

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SPECIAL THANKS TO THOSE PERSONS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE REVISED EDITION OF THE KENYA CULTURE GUIDE:

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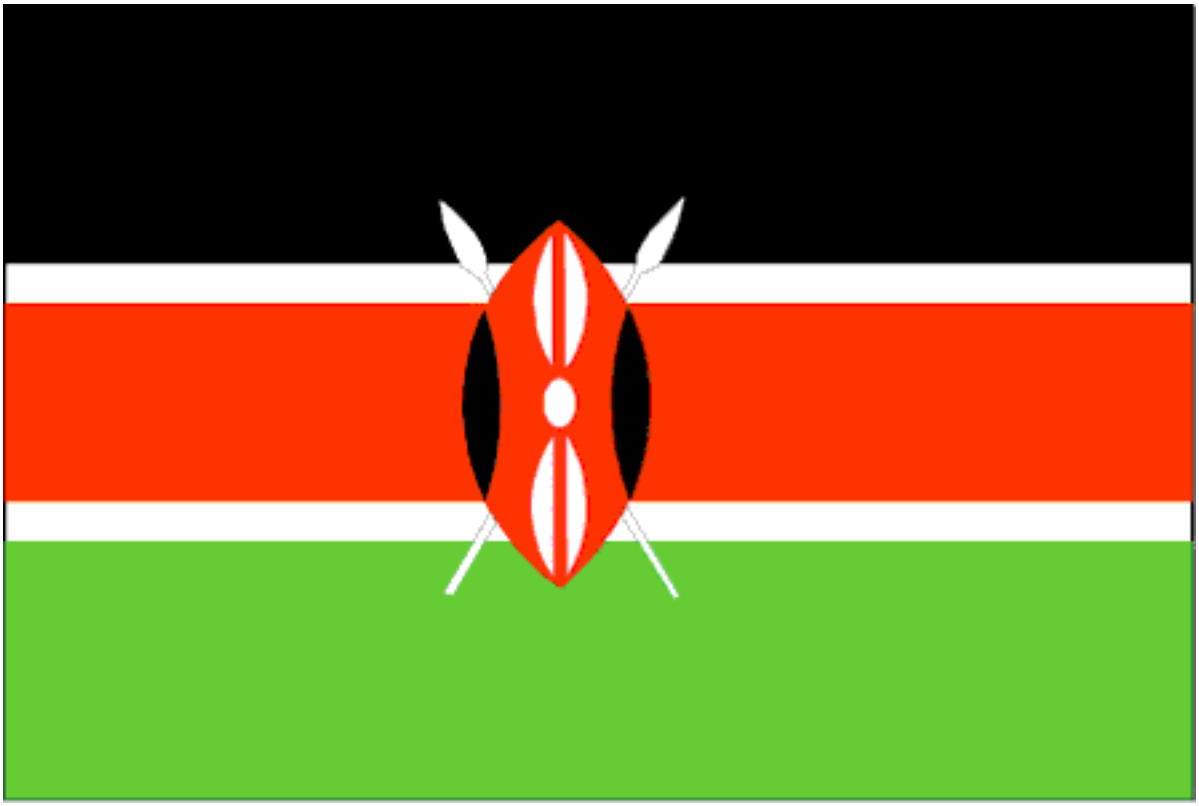


INTRODUCTION

For those who have experienced the profound cultural differences between some Middle and Far East countries and the West, a tour of Kenya will present little challenge. The city of Nairobi is beautiful and offers most modern conveniences. Except during periodic shortages, most commodities are available. Fruits and vegetables in large variety are abundant most of the year; skilled repairmen are available; and, except in rush hour, traffic moderate. In short, daily living is not the constant frustration found in many developing countries. There are theater groups, clubs, the National Museum and the University of Nairobi, a fascinating variety of cultures to study, endless volunteer needs, church groups, game parks, and archeological digs. The possibilities for entertainment and personal growth are boundless.

For the most part, Kenyans are friendly, tolerant, and face life with a positive outlook. Their basic values do differ from Western values, but not greatly enough to interfere with cultivation of very rewarding personal relationships.

Armed with just a little knowledge of the cultural background and customs of Kenya, a foreigner can look forward to a pleasant tour.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

A major pitfall with any study of people and their ideas is the tendency to forget that everyone is an individual and has unique reactions based upon his own life experiences and basic personality makeup. This is especially true in Kenya, where many cultural and ethnic groups, each with its own traditional behavior and customs, are now interacting, thereby influencing and altering old attitudes. For everyone, the rapid changes brought about by modernization, and the influence of cultures imported through closer world communications, are slowly changing the old values and customs, sometimes with mixed results. As in most countries, there are very large differences between what is acceptable in the urban areas and what is acceptable in the rural villages. Many rural relatives make allowances when their city kin come for a visit. The elders mumble to themselves that these "city kids" cannot be expected to behave properly. As a rule, it is important to be much more conservative and attentive to custom when dealing with rural, older, or uneducated Kenyans, and especially those who have had little contact with foreigners.

Racial considerations are a fact of daily life in Kenya, as they are in any country with a mixed racial composition. From the very beginning, the leaders of Kenya decided that this would be a multiracial country, with each group fulfilling its role in development. The Black population was at a disadvantage at the time of independence, and it still has higher rates of unemployment, and lower average incomes. This causes resentment, especially among the educated. Black leadership governs the country, and "Kenyanization" of foreign and locally owned industries is a government policy, drawing Africans into positions of responsibility and actual ownership of business. But progress is slow.

Many Americans tend to be overly sensitive to racial issues. The legacy of guilt born from slavery, and years of discrimination in Kenya against Blacks and other minorities, compounded with heightened awareness of the issue of equality, cause problems for some Americans when they come to the country and hire domestics. It may help to keep in mind that almost everyone has domestic help in Kenya. Even a poor woman will have another woman to care for her children when she's at work. Things are improving, and in the meantime you are providing employment for someone who needs it. Your own attitudes regarding racial issues must be settled in your own mind while living here.

ABOUT KENYA

Kenya became a fully independent member of the British Commonwealth in 1963, after several decades of continuous struggle against British rule. Kenyans are very proud of their efforts to gain independence, and the leaders of the struggle still carry political clout and are treated with respect. The late Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, was a popular leader in the fight for independence.

PEOPLE

The CIA World Factbook estimates the population of Kenya as 32,021,856 persons (February 10, 2005), including Arabs, Asians from India and Pakistan, and whites, originating in many countries. The ancestors of present-day Arabs who live near the coast first arrived between the 8th and 10th centuries, migrating southward along the trade routes bordering the Indian Ocean. With them came Islam, which is practiced by an estimated six percent of the population.

Some Asians came as traders but many were brought to Kenya by the British government to help build the railroad line which now leads from Mombassa to Lake Sango (Lake Victoria). Their descendants presently dominate much of the business sector in the urban areas.

The White population came first as missionaries and explorers, then later as settlers during the period of British rule, beginning in the late 19th century. With the missionaries came the Christian religion, now practiced by over 60 percent of the Kenyan population (Protestant 45%; Catholic 33%; Muslim 10%; Indigenous beliefs 10%) (*CIA World Factbook,* February 10, 2005).

A significant percentage of all Kenyans live in the rural areas, sustaining their existence by farming small plots of land ("Shambas"), or herding cattle, sheep, and goats. Many families have one or more members who have migrated to urban centers seeking employment and higher education. These members then contribute to the support of their families. Most urban Kenyans have familial ties to their home villages, to which they return periodically for visits or during times of unemployment.

Estimates for the percentage of Kenya's population that adheres to Islam or indigenous beliefs vary widely but the latest statistics put Muslims at 10 percent.

The development of industries and cash crops, consisting mainly of tea, coffee, beef, sisal (used in making baskets, ropes, mats, etc.) and pyrethrum (used in insecticides) has increased the number of employment opportunities within the monetary economy; but unemployment, especially among the Black population, remains high.

RELIGION

Christianity is the majority religion, a result of years of missionary work before and during the period of British rule. Christians are deeply sincere regarding their religious beliefs, and their sense of affiliation is much more intense than that of some foreigners. Historically, there were periods of extreme competition between Catholic and Protestant followers, and today one is likely to find that even among the Protestants, Christians attach great importance to the fact that they are Baptist, or Presbyterian. Foreigners tend to be less sensitive about their religion and must be careful not to discuss lightly the religion or religious affiliation of their Kenyan friends.

Islam also cultivates a strong sense of affiliation and strict personal obligation in daily living and behavior. Most Westerners are not very familiar with Islam, but a working knowledge of and respect for its practices is essential for friendships to develop and be sustained.

The five "pillars" of Islam are:

- confession that there is no god but Allah; and that Mohammed, who (along with Moses, Jesus, and other messengers) presented basic rules for living and interacting on earth, is His Prophet;

- prayerful worship at five set times during each day;

- payment of an offering for the needy;

- fasting during the Muslim month of Ramadan. From dawn to sunset personal indulgences such as eating, drinking, and smoking are not permitted. At the end of Ramadan is a celebration called "Id-Ul-Fitr," with much happiness, gift exchange, and visiting among friends and family;

- pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca at least once in a lifetime if a person can afford the trip without financial hurt to his family. The "Hajj," as the pilgrimage is called, comes at the beginning of the month of "Al-Hajj." The 10th day of "Al Hajj" is called "Id-Ul-Adha," which commemorates the sacrifice of a ram in place of Abraham's son. During this holiday, animals are sacrificed and shared with the less fortunate.

In many countries, Muslim women are seldom allowed in public places, and then only if they are veiled. In Kenya, some Muslim women may wear long capes called "Buibui's," but they are usually free to move about in public unveiled. Nowadays many Muslim women work. The Swahili Muslims, who live on the coast, have among their ancestors the Arab immigrants. Their customs differ subtly from Muslims whose ancestors came from India and Pakistan. But common to both are the basic Muslim rules regarding modest dress for women, limited interaction of the sexes, and prohibition against liquor and pork. These rules and obligations permeate most aspects of Muslim life, and those who act as guests and hosts of Muslim friends must honor and abide by these rules, or risk losing a valued friend.

There are many other religions practiced in Kenya. There are many Hindus and Sikhs among the Indian and Pakistani population. An estimated 40 percent of the population still follow their traditional religions. These are too diverse to describe in detail, but they make a good course of study for those interested in the subject. Some groups or individuals officially counted as Christian or Muslim in fact practice their traditional ethnic religions combined in varying degrees with some aspects of the imported religions. As with all religions, restraint and proper respect for a person's beliefs are important.

LANGUAGE

There are over 40 language groups in Kenya. In the urban areas English is so commonly spoken that most daily interactions are accomplished with no problem. In the rural areas communication is more difficult. Through the years Kiswahili has come into more common usage. Originating in the coastal region, Kiswahili is a Bantu language structurally, with many words derived from Arabic. Kiswahili and English are the official languages of Kenya, and all candidates for Parliament are required to pass a proficiency exam in both languages in order to stand for election. Both English and Kiswahili are used for official government communication and business. Although many Kenyans are comfortable speaking English, knowledge of Kiswahili can be very useful in opening up communications with those whose English is very limited. More Kenyan youth speak Kiswahili now more than ever before as the government has made Kiswahili compulsory in schools. Most people are friendlier when a guest in their country shows interest in learning their language. If you have the time and resources, the study of Kiswahili will widen your circle of friends and help you to gain an understanding of your host country.

HOLIDAYS

Official Christian holidays include Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas. Christmas is very important to even non-Christian Kenyans. Friends

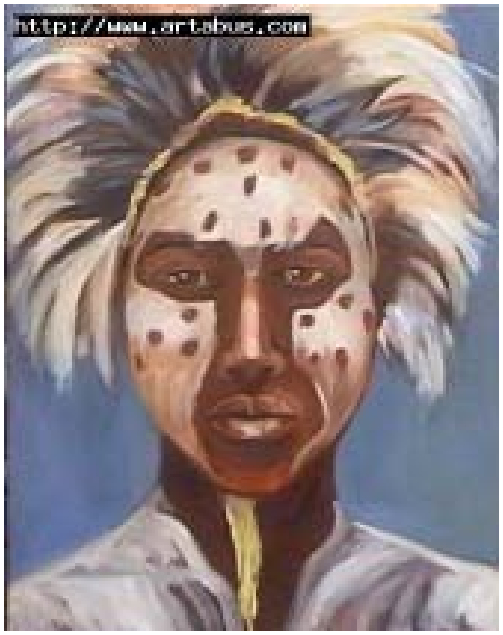
and especially employees appreciate the common observance of cards and gifts. Domestic employees may be given up to a month's salary as a bonus or special gift, although the monetary value of the gift and bonus are up to the employer, and depends upon the length of service and the relationship. Boxing Day, based on the British custom of visiting on the day after Christmas, is also an official holiday.

Muslim holidays include Id-Ul-Fitr and Id-Ul-Adha. Non-Muslim staff may not require the day off, but since these are official holidays, staff must be paid an extra day's wages if they choose to work.

The national holidays below mark some event in Kenya's gaining of independence:

Madaraka Day (June 1)- celebrates the day in 1963 when Kenya was granted internal self-government by Britain.

Jamhuri Day (December 12)- commemorates the day in 1963 when Kenya was formally declared independent from British rule.



A Kikuyu warrior belonging to Kenya's largest ethnic group. Painting by Sophie Dumont

Independence Day (December 12, 1964) - Kenya became a Republic within the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Kenyatta Day (October 20) - marks the day that the British declared the state of emergency in 1952. Kenyatta was arrested and detained shortly after the declaration on that day.

New Year's Day (January 1) and Kenyan **Labor Day** (May 1)

These are official holidays in Kenya, and all Kenyans are entitled to a holiday or to an extra day's wages.

ETHNIC GROUPS

Over 40 ethnic groups exist in Kenya, each with its own territorial identifications, customs, dress, dances, music, and philosophical approach to life and the supernatural. Generally these can be broadly grouped linguistically as Bantu, Nilotic, Paranilotic, and Cushitic. The Bantu are thought to have migrated from somewhere in the mid-continent. The Nilotic, the Paranilotic, and the Cushitic-speaking groups immigrated slowly from various locations in northern Africa, preponderantly from the Lake Chad and Sudan areas. Depending upon the rainfall and topography of the area of settlement, the groups slowly developed into agriculturists or pastoralists. This division of livelihood persists today, with some overlapping, for the 90 percent of the population who inhabit the rural areas. The western and central areas, suitable for crop production, comprise only 25 percent of the land area, while the northern, more arid, land will support only limited numbers of nomadic people who wander in search of water and grazing land for their herds.

The Kikuyu, a Bantu group that inhabits the central areas constitute 22 percent of the Kenyan population, and hence are the largest ethnic group in Kenya. They are chiefly agriculturists who, due to greater contact with Europeans during the British rule, were the most influenced by the economic and

Many Kenyans still accept witchcraft and believe in the power of charms.

cultural changes brought by the Europeans and were the first to develop a political consciousness. They were the leaders in the struggle for independence and remain today a strong political force.

The Luhya (14%), Luo (13%), Kalenjin (12%), and Kamba (11%) groups are the next largest ethnic groups of the population. (*CIA World Factbook*, February 10, 2005) Together, these five groups comprise over 60 percent of the population; other ethnic groups include Kisii 6%, Meru 6%, other African 15%, and non-African (Asian, European, and Arab) 1%, evidence that a very large diversity of backgrounds is found together within the national borders of Kenya.

Before the arrival of the European, these groups had limited contact with each other. The colonial period and the subsequent emergence of Kenya as a political entity, irrespective of tribal boundaries, have forced greater interaction between the ethnic groups, sometimes causing dissension. The government is working very hard to overcome the hazards of "tribalism." The continuing political stability of Kenya is a measure of the success of both the government and the people in their efforts to put the benefits of national unity before ethnic loyalties.

TRADITIONAL VALUES

With the diverse cultural background of the ethnic groups in Kenya, traditional values vary greatly from group to group. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to make many general statements. A few basic values, however, do cross ethnic lines and can be found in many groups.

COMMON BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Almost all groups believe in a Supreme Being, a creator who is omnipotent. This creator goes by many names, and sometimes is believed to reside in a sacred dwelling place; a mountain, for instance. Most believe that man possesses a spirit, and some believe that this spirit remains involved in the affairs of man after death. Many groups believe in the existence of evil spirits, which they hope to keep at a distance through prayer and sacrifice. Acceptance of witchcraft and belief in the power of charms and curses are still very common, although denounced by educated Kenyans and government officials. This subject can be a very interesting course of study.

In traditional societies, taking the life of another person was usually considered taboo, and was punished by various means. For some, ritual cleansing was required after committing the offense; in others, payment of some kind was demanded. Each group followed its own code of laws. In some groups, euthanasia was at times practiced in the case of a grossly deformed newborn, or a hopelessly ill older person. In modern Kenya, this practice is illegal. Capital punishment was used in some societies in the case of a grave offense, and is now carried out as punishment for selected crimes in present-day Kenya.

KINSHIP AND COMMUNITY

Family and community are very important. Each ethnic group is divided into many clans and lineages, all believed to have descended from one ancestor. One's family and community give a sense of personal identification. Each member is expected to contribute to the community and to support its members, both emotionally and materially, if needed. Social relationships are very binding and each member fulfills his role for the good of the community.

Age is an important criterion in the changing life roles. The young are students in life, learning the techniques of their livelihood and the traditional beliefs and practices of the group. Each person is taught the skills appropriate to his sex and age. The young men, especially, must gain knowledge and maturity for the time when they will become leaders of the group. With advancing years comes unquestioning respect, as men become elders in the group and the women become mentors for the young girls. The unquestioned authority of the old solidifies the group behavior and minimizes potentially damaging disputes.

Respect for authority is still very evident and sometimes interferes with the employer/employee relationship. Conflict with a supervisor tends to be avoided. An employee may choose to quietly seethe, or even quit, rather than confront his/her employer with a serious complaint.

Because of the importance of the community, cooperation and even temper are valued traits. Under almost all circumstances, losing one's temper and causing a scene is non-productive in the long run. Kenyans like to keep a day-to-day relationship pleasant and, if this cannot be accomplished, they are likely to break off the relationship.

TRADITIONAL FAMILY ROLES

In traditional Kenyan society women are held to high expectations: they are expected to be submissive and faithful to their husbands, hard working, even-tempered, and capable of bearing and rearing a large family. To fail in any of these may invite a woman's beating from her husband, or even a divorce.

Men are expected to be the undisputed heads of the household. They must support their family and assist their wives in the rearing of the children. Polygamy is common, and men are expected to treat each wife fairly and equally.

Children are expected to be obedient and hard working. Many start helping in the home and fields at a very early age.

Roles are changing slowly, especially in the urban areas. But even in homes of educated Kenyans, is it not uncommon for husbands to retain complete authority. Unemployment has separated many families as men migrate to urban centers seeking employment. Many women are therefore acting as head of the household for large portions of the year, sometimes causing problems when their husbands rejoin them.

ROLE MODELS

While bravery, wise leadership, and generosity are still respected traits, modern society has changed many attitudes. Today, the young are likely to look to local politicians or successful businessmen as role models rather than to the elders in their home village. Girls, also, look to those women active in politics or business for leadership.

CHANGING TIMES

Kenyans enjoy life, but are used to hard work, and most share the Western appreciation for "getting things done." This may help explain their apparent ability to assimilate the changes associated with modernization without the devastating effects seen in some developing countries. There are, however, serious problems resulting from the lessening of traditional values and ways of living. Urban unemployment, the breakdown of the extended family and the community, and the loss of personal identity result in confusion for the young. The answers are no easier for Kenyans than they are for anyone else, but the problems are recognized and many people are dedicated to finding workable solutions.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Most Kenyans are compassionate, but reserved in their interpersonal relationships. They have a sense of serenity and self-confidence about them, which makes their companionship pleasant. It may be hard to draw close to co-workers and neighbors due to mutual shyness. Some Kenyans see Americans as a tightly knit group, relatively uninterested in Kenyan friendships, and therefore they may be unlikely actively to seek friendships within the American community, until foreigners give sure signs that friendship is desired. Family responsibilities may limit the amount of time that can be given toward cultivating a new friendship. Women, especially, often act as head of the household, holding down a job, and often caring for a large number of children. They simply do not have time for outside socializing. To develop any new friendship, time and effort are required. Often the foreigner must take the initiative. Knowledge of common social customs will help ease the way.

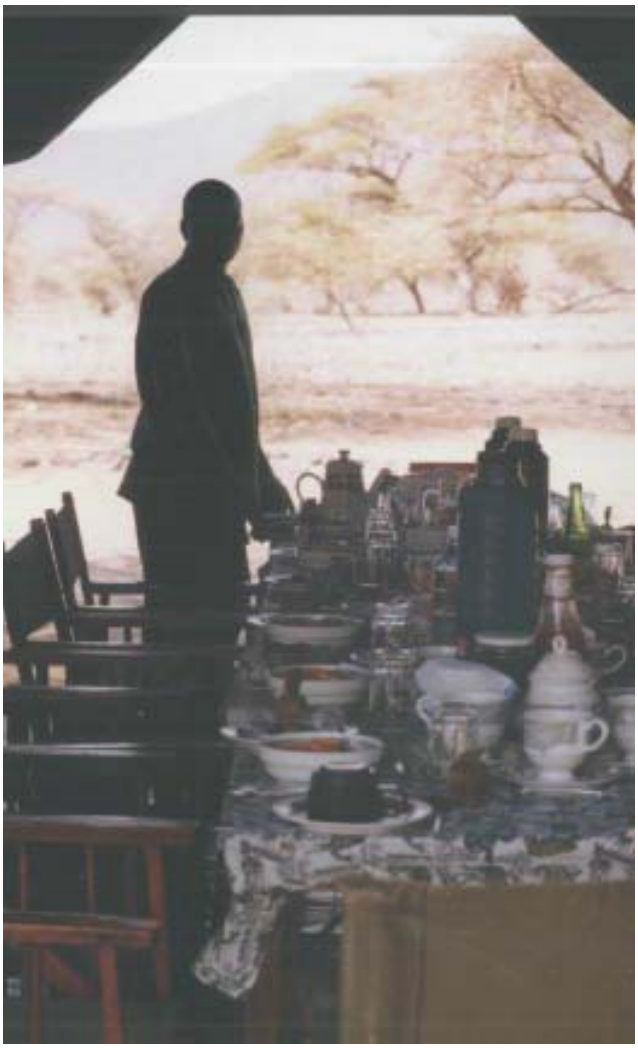
GREETINGS

Most Americans would say that we are quick to shake hands as a form of greeting. But Kenyans put us to shame. Handshaking is a universal and very necessary form of greeting and is practiced by all, including children. A wife and husband who just ate breakfast together are likely to shake hands upon meeting at a 10:00 am coffee break. Family and friends rarely engage in conversation without shaking hands first. The gesture is not just a greeting; it means that there is peace and good will between the greeters. To be perceived as reticent about shaking someone's hand is to create an impression of untrustworthiness, and a European ("Mzungu") who is slow to offer his hand may be regarded as one who feels himself superior to the "Mwananchi" (common man). Try to get into the habit of offering your hand to everyone, especially a friend or acquaintance. Your children should also be taught this habit. It will go a long way toward establishing a feeling of closeness with your Kenyan friends.

Public displays of affections beyond the customary handshake should be avoided for members of the opposite sex. Holding hands and touching members of the same sex are acceptable in public, and are commonly seen between friends.

INTRODUCTIONS

These are very similar to the Western forms. When introduced, shake hands. Names are not important on first meeting. Titles, however, are important. If you know someone's title, use it. Do not use first names right away, unless you are told to do so. If you are with a friend, and another person whom you do not know is present, it is better to ask your friend to introduce you rather than directly introducing yourself and asking his name.



This Kenyan man prepares a meal for "Mzungu," or Europeans, part of the deal a local safari tour offers.

Do not be dismayed if your friends and employees seem to have several names. Permanent, legal names are a very new phenomenon in this country. Most people are called a name in reference to their children, "Mama" (mother of) Mary, or "Baba" (father of) Mary. A person's parents, and uncles, may call him a name from childhood such as "one who was born at night," or a name of a favorite grandmother. Other names are associated with circumcision or coming-of-age ceremonies. Friends may know him as "son of Margaret from Kasumi." It is best to call your friends by the name that they give to you when introduced, but do not be surprised if other acquaintances call them an entirely different name.

ENTERTAINING

In Kenya, one definition of a friend is someone who is likely to drop in on you at any time, even at 10:00 p.m. Friends are always welcome and are entertained regardless of any possible inconvenience in timing. A sure way to communicate to a Kenyan that you would like to be friends is to give him a detailed map to your house, with an open invitation to drop in at any time. And mean it. If you are successful in conveying your message of friendship, he will drop by, in which case you will entertain him by bringing out tea or a fruit drink (squash is popular) and something light to eat.

As a rule, you should offer a drink of some kind to everyone who comes to your house, even workmen who will stay only a half-hour or so. Some say that you should not offer food and drink to a guest, just bring it out without a word. To ask may imply that you do not wish him to stay. If you are just sitting down to eat when friends drop in, find some way to make the food stretch and feed them without question.

Some Americans find this informal visiting upsetting at times, and it does take a little planning. But it is worth the effort when the result is a new friendship. In turn, your friends may expect you to visit them unexpectedly, if they have given you directions to their house. Americans will wonder "What if they are busy or just going out?" and hesitate to stop. But there is no better way to demonstrate that you consider people your friends than to drop in when you are in the neighborhood. They will be delighted and, since they are used to it, they will always be prepared to entertain you.

In some cases, however, you may find that people who enthusiastically visit you never seem to encourage you to visit them. They may feel shy about their house or some other personal circumstance. In this case, it may help to meet on neutral ground, such as a café.

Remember that even the salaries of educated Kenyans are generally lower than American salaries. For them a friendship must be inexpensive, or it cannot be pursued. When entertaining, keep the menu modest, perhaps eggs or fruit. Suggest inexpensive outings such as a picnic. If Kenyans feel they must compete with lavish entertainment, they will have to withdraw.

Because of the relaxed manner in which friends visit, Kenyans may not see the importance of giving a binding answer to a formal invitation. Even for official functions, RSVPs may not be a good indication as to how many guests will actually come. You must be prepared for any number, and just plan to use the leftovers that you may have. If there is no response, most likely the guest is not coming, but this is not certain. When guests are invited to dinner, do not be surprised if some do not come at the last minute, or, if they do come, they bring an extra person or two. It is all part of their more relaxed method of entertaining, and you as a good host must graciously welcome any and all that come. Buffets are a good way to achieve some flexibility.

Time is not important when entertaining and being entertained, so some of your guests may be very late, even as much as two hours. Learn to expect it, then sit back, relax, and enjoy your other guests until all arrive.

As hosts you should always have non-alcoholic beverages available for your non-drinking guests. For food, the safest fare would be chicken or beef. Keep in mind that Muslims may not eat pork, and many Hindus eat no beef. Some Kenyans are not comfortable with fish either.

At the end of the evening, do not say goodbye at the door. Go to their car with your guests, especially if it is a small gathering. This is a traditional custom called "escorting." In rural areas, hosts will walk guests to the bus stop, or a bit less than halfway to their houses. If your guests are on foot, escort them at least to the gate.

BEING ENTERTAINED

When formally invited to a home of a Kenyan friend or business associate, you should RSVP just as you would an American host. Your Kenyan friends may be amused at your conscientiousness but, on the other hand, things are changing, and some hosts do hope that guest will indicate if he will be coming. You should shake hands with each and every person that you meet and talk to. If you are dining at someone's home, try to eat a healthy portion; leave your diet at home for the evening. Kenyans love to see a guest enjoy his food. The right hand holds special significance to most Kenyans probably due to the Arab influence, so try to remember to use the right hand for reaching and eating. Kenyans invite you to their house to relax and enjoy yourselves, so forget your troubles and have a good time. This will make your hosts feel successful and more comfortable in your presence. Americans tend to be a bit too shy and formal at social gatherings.

You may be invited to the rural home of a friend. Here you will be quite the novelty, and a very honored guest. Accept the special attention with a pleased attitude and try not to be embarrassed. Your behavior will be more important, as rural families are more conservative. Upon arrival, you will be introduced to the family, who will expect to shake your hand. Your children should respectfully shake the hand of all present. You will be offered tea or other refreshment, and, as in most cultures, it would be considered unsociable to not accept and at least drink a little. Women guests may be invited to chat in the kitchen, but men are never allowed into this women's domain. Your children will be welcome guests and are allowed to roam the grounds and play with the children of your friends if they wish. If you stay for dinner, which is likely, you may be served chicken, a local bean and grain mixture of "Ugali," a national dish made with cornmeal. Your hosts may slaughter a goat or sheep in honor of your visit. It would be

courteous to eat a healthy portion, although it is not necessary to finish. Try to remember to eat with your right hand. Small talk may be difficult due to the language barrier, but with a spirit of fun and good will you can still enjoy the company of your hosts.

In Muslim families, it is customary for the sexes to segregate. Even if social interaction between the sexes is allowed, physical contact beyond a handshake is not. In non-Muslim families this segregation is not important, but you will probably be more comfortable talking to members of the household who are of your sex. In some traditional societies, it is customary for a woman and her father-in-law to keep some distance between them. The same is true for a man and his mother-in-law. If the two are riding in a car, for instance, a mother-in-law will not sit next to her daughter's husband, but in the back seat, even if they are the only two in the car. This may carry over into situations such as traveling in a car with your employees. Also, in a social situation, an older gentleman or lady may avoid talking alone to a younger person of the opposite sex. Be aware of the custom and do not take it personally.

Do not say how fat, how healthy, or how beautiful a baby is—it can make a mother ill at ease. It may also incite jealousy in a spirit or a person who has special powers, and the baby may sicken as a result.

In rural areas, it is best not to ask personal questions, especially those concerning one's children, their names, ages, or the number one has. In traditional society, it was considered boasting to say, "I have six children." It may offend or incite envy that could result in harm to them. In Nairobi, people are more relaxed and are usually more at ease discussing their families. In some areas, you should remember not to touch children on the head. Parents are especially nervous about a baby or very young child. Infant mortality has always been high, and Americans can make a mother ill at ease by saying how fat, how healthy, or how beautiful a baby is. This may also incite jealousy in a spirit or a person who has special powers, and the baby may sicken as a result. It is much better to remark on how the baby looks like the mother, or has such big eyes, and so on. For the same reason, the subject of pregnancy is also one that will make some women uncomfortable. Do not discuss a woman's pregnancy unless she volunteers the information.

Kenyans love babies, so don't be surprised if yours is reached for and held by many women. They may offer their baby to you as well.

When visiting a rural family, a gift is not absolutely necessary, but would be a very nice gesture. A bottle of squash water, or other commodity that is hard to get in rural areas would be appreciated. A gift that will have long term practical use is also good. Blankets, bed sheets, or other types of cloth are suitable and will help you be remembered each time that the gift is used. You might ask your friend for suggestions. If presents are brought for children, it is best to give them to

These Msasai women are dressed for a traditional wedding.

the parents first. If you do not bring something with you when you visit, it is a nice gesture to send a present after your visit, although it is not required. As you leave, you may be offered a chicken or other item to take with you. It is offered in good faith and should be accepted.

Just a note in passing: fighting among children is discouraged in many groups, so it is a good idea to remind your children not to quarrel in public. In some groups, children are taught not to cry past the age of four or five years, and your child may be laughed at if he cries in public past that age. Children of all ages are expected to be unobtrusive in the presence of adults and should not barge into adult conversations or groups.

WEDDINGS, FUNERALS, BAPTISMS

Most weddings and funerals to which you will be invited are based on Christian tradition, so matters of dress, behavior, and protocol will be no different than those to which you are accustomed. Black clothing is not required for funerals, but dark colors are appropriate. Wedding gifts can be anything practical: towels, sheets, napkins, or dishes. Funeral offerings are usually in the form of money, which is used to defray the expenses of feeding the large number of family members who come to stay.

The baptism of a baby is a very important event, and, again, the customs are for the most part based on the Christian traditions. A gift may be given depending upon your relationship with the parents. The needs are the same: clothes, blankets, etc.

The chief difference between these special occasions in Kenya and in the West is the pace of events. A wedding, for instance, may take all day, especially those taking place outside the urban setting. The pace is slow, and you will only frustrate yourself if you go to a wedding scheduled for 1:00 p.m. and expect to be home by 4:00 p.m. Set the whole day aside, then relax and enjoy the occasion.

ASPECTS OF DAILY INTERACTION

GESTURES

Kenyans are not given to the use of gestures. If you see a Kenyan making gestures with his hands, they are likely to pertain to

numbers. One couple stopped a Masai family on the road in the hopes of getting a photograph. In the course of the negotiations, the man repeatedly made a gesture with one of his hands. They were sure that it had a significant meaning and were anxious to ask their Nairobi friends about it. They were disappointed to learn that the man was simply indicating that he wanted five shillings for the privilege of photographing his family. In traffic, if someone becomes annoyed with other motorists, he is likely to honk his horn or flash his lights, but no gestures are used to indicate his irritation. Therefore, there are not many gestures that Americans are likely to use that would cause unintentional misunderstandings.

There are a few exceptions, however. The most universal is the common palm-up, index finger wagging gesture that Americans use to indicate "come here." Most Kenyans, regardless of background, are likely to feel degraded when called with this gesture. Only dogs, and sometimes small children, are summoned this way and most adults will not respond at all to this gesture, except perhaps with an insulted glare. Beckon with the whole hand, fingers together; or better still, the whole forearm.

To wave hello or goodbye with only the fingers or hand moving up and down invites misinterpretation. It mimics the "come here" sign too closely. Your message will be read better if you move the hand in a motion similar to wiping mist off a mirror (side to side).

Pointing with the index finger makes some people uncomfortable. Better to point with all fingers together, and even then, subtly.

Putting one's hands on the hips is construed as a gesture of defiance, especially when done by a women. Crossing arms or letting them hang at the sides will seem less aggressive.

When giving an object to another person, get into the habit of using your right hand. This is especially true for gifts and money, but if you cultivate the habit for everything that you hand to people, you are safe.

To give with the left hand communicates that you are not sincere in your offering and that the item itself may be a little suspect as a result. To accept money or items with both hands is a sign of respect and indicates a total warm-hearted acceptance of the offering.

CONVERSATIONS AND ATTITUDES

The words "stupid," "silly," and "foolish" have a very negative emotional impact on most Kenyans. No one likes to be called stupid, but to a Kenyan is has a much deeper meaning. This is in part due to the colonial period, when the more educated supervisors used these words to describe their African helpers. But aside from this, the words simply have a more negative connotation here. Many do not even like to hear these words used to describe one's self: "Oh, what a stupid thing I just did." It is better to refrain from using them altogether. Of course, using these words in the course of correcting a Kenyan employee is going to accomplish absolutely nothing but to foster ill feelings, which may hamper the future working relationship.

When addressing someone whom you do not know, or when trying to gain someone's attention, the proper form of address is the word "Bwana" for men and the word "Mama" for women. Very old men may be called "Mzee" (pronounced mm-zay), while older women may be called "Bibi." These are the equivalents to "madam" and "sir" in English. Children should be taught to use these terms too. You will most likely be called "Bwana" or "Mama." "Jambo, Mama" can sound impertinent coming from a young male, because we are used to it being used as an equivalent of "Hello Cutie. What's happening?"

When visiting a rural area, children may gather and stare. Many will know a little English and would like to use it with you.

in American culture. Be assured that it is an address form spoken with respect.

Americans in general tend to be very abrupt, hurried, and too direct in their interactions with people from other countries. An educated Kenyan who is hurried by another Kenyan is apt to say, "Where do you think you are, New York?" Kenyans value honesty and forthrightness, and they appreciate this trait in Americans. But many are put off by the unwillingness of Americans to be a bit more indirect in our dealings with them, to slow down, and to pass the time of day for a few minutes before plunging into business.

In rural areas this is so important that one may not get around to business for an hour, or not at all during the first visit. You should train yourself to stop, say "Hello, how are you?" with a smile, each and every time you begin a conversation, even if only asking directions to the corner store. As a rule, the more important the business, the slower it should be approached.

When entering an office, stand back a bit and let the person there ask if he can help you. He sees the initiative as his, not yours. Always be willing to spend a minute or so in polite conversation before stating your business. You will end up getting faster service in the long run. If things seem at first impossible, do not go away; you should hang about, look sad, take your time. Another five minutes might evoke sympathy, and a better chance of positive results than would blustering, followed by an angry exit.

Employees especially enjoy these social niceties. Cooks or secretaries that you see every day appreciate a "Good morning" and a smile as you start each day. It really makes a difference, and the results in better

cooperation and productive work are almost as gratifying as the cheerful difference it may make in your attitude, too.

GOING TO RURAL AREAS

Even if you do not have an opportunity to visit a rural village with a formal invitation, it is possible to make an opportunity to interact with rural people during one of your trips out of Nairobi. It is perfectly safe to stop at a small "Duka" or teahouse for a soda or a cup of tea. The tea water is boiled and considered safe. The people are usually hospitable and some that speak English may want to talk to you, so you may not have much privacy. Keep in mind also that your hosts may not see more than a handful of "Wazungu" (whites or foreigners) every year so you will be very much the center of interest. Children may gather and stare. Many of them will know little English and may like to use it with you. You can try to overcome their shyness by asking simple questions: "Do you speak English?" "Do you go to school?" They are extremely overwhelmed by you and may be a little frightened, but if you smile and relax, they will have a pleasant time and probably go away with a good memory of your visit.

Most people travel to the Masai Mara Game Reserve and take the opportunity to make contact with the Masai who live along the route. Few speak English and many do not speak much Kiswahili, so verbal communication is difficult. If you are interested in photographs, those who live near the road are used to being asked and may be willing for a negotiated price to be photographed. They don't like it particularly; they feel ridiculous and are mystified at your preoccupation with photographing them, but they like having the money and a few may actually be flattered.

Never take a photograph without asking permission of any rural person, or take any other liberty for that matter. It is just common decency and good manners. They are individuals with their own sets of values, which must be respected. Some will say no to a photograph for personal reasons and you must abide by their wishes.

The Masai "Moran" (young warriors) are apt to be more sensitive and must be approached with extreme care and respect. Do not try to touch them, such as putting your arm around them for a photo. Trying to take a sneak-photo without their permission from a distance may upset them just as much as it would at close range. You may get your picture, but you have made it difficult for the next foreigner who comes after you. Many rural people think that binoculars are cameras, so be careful with their use as well.

Spitting upon a departing stranger is sometimes used as a way of saying, "go in peace" in traditional Masai society. In the unlikely event that this happens, accept it as a friendly gesture.

POLITE CONVERSATIONS

Many people do not really know what to say when it comes to small talk at parties. In general, Americans tend to ask questions when meeting someone for the first time. This is very offensive to most Kenyans. It is best to discuss neutral subjects at first: the weather, what a nice party it is, the food, etc. A barrage of questions, especially personal questions, makes Kenyans very uncomfortable and they will find the quickest way out. As you become more acquainted, they will gradually discuss their personal life. They, in turn, do not expect you to volunteer personal information at first either. It may embarrass them. This is not done upon first meetings.

With men, one can discuss business, if it is a point in common. Women are traditionally quiet in mixed groups and many American wives are shy about

approaching them, afraid of offending by discussing the wrong subject. Urban women may be willing to talk about their family, work outside the home, or schools. But, again, personal questions are best left until later in the conversation. The recent difficulty in getting flour or milk, or the recent rain, is safest at first. If they seem to be at ease, you may ask where their family home is located. They may then like to tell you more about the area, what crops are grown, what the weather is like, and so on. But try not to make it seem like a third degree, as Americans tend to do.

Kenyans are very proud of their children, and especially if they have a large number. If you do ask about their children and they are willing to discuss them, remember to leave your thoughts on population issues at home. Some Americans are tempted to make a good-natured joke upon learning that someone has nine children. Don't. Children are deeply valued.

DAILY LIVING

DRESS

Muslims have strong taboos against immodesty in women (and men too, by the way). Although this religion is not dominant in Kenya, these taboos are very important to remember when traveling to the coast, where there are many Muslims. Swimming suits and shorts should not be worn in any public places. You will see others do it and be tempted, but there is no sense in your adding to the insult. African women as a rule wear dresses, either alone or with a large cloth called a "Kanga" wrapped around their waists. Conservative Kenyans are offended by women wearing slacks. The reason for this originates in the fact that the thigh area is considered the most erotic portion of the body, and any form of dress that exposes or outlines this area is considered provocative, therefore inappropriate. That is why miniskirts are usually covered with the "Kanga" when in public. Slacks are becoming more popular in Nairobi among the young, but in the rural areas it is best to wear a skirt or dress if you plan to be out of the car very much. Grubby jeans and T-shirts are not appropriate street wear in any part of the country, for either sex. People appreciate decent, clean clothing, and expect it of all who can afford it.

DRIVING AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Traffic moves on the left side of the road, British style. This requires practice and vigilance for the first few months until thinking "left" becomes second nature. A righthand-drive car helps, but many people prefer to bring their own lefthand-drive cars. It is a disadvantage, especially when passing other cars, and extra care is needed. As a rule, people in Kenya drive with more common sense than in some countries, but there are many who use excessive speed, pass under very dangerous conditions, and otherwise endanger the lives of other motorists and pedestrians. This fact, combined with narrow, two-lane roads often filled with deep potholes, makes driving one of the most dangerous activities in Kenya. Very keen awareness and dedicated defensive driving is an absolute necessity.

On roadways between city centers, the driver of a slow-moving vehicle in front of you will many times signal when it is safe to pass. A right turn signal means do not pass. He is either telling you that he himself is turning right (since you pass on the right, this means he would turn into your passing lane and hit you) or that cars are approaching from the other direction and it is unsafe to pass. A left turn signal means that it is safe to

A crowded city, Nairobi is plagued with traffic congestion

pass. He is either turning left or there are no cars approaching. You must never trust these signals totally, although they are very helpful when you are trying to pass.

Gasoline stations are very modern and the service is good. You may tip the attendant 10 to 20 shillings if you like.

One grim reality that should be mentioned concerns action in case of a serious accident, or if your car hits a pedestrian. Kenyans are prone to taking the law into their own hands. At times this has meant personally assaulting the driver. If you are walking in downtown Nairobi and someone grabs your purse, yell "thief" and you are very likely to get your purse back. The other people passing will drop everything and pursue the thief and usually catch him. And woe to the thief who gets caught in the act. He is liable to be literally beaten to death if no one intervenes on his behalf.

This behavior secretly warms the heart of some Americans who believe that thieves get off lightly in America. But this same behavior can be very serious in the event you yourself are involved in an unfortunate accident where someone is injured or killed, or property is destroyed. If at all possible, it is best not to stay at the scene, but continue to the nearest police station to get help. This is especially true if a crowd of angry people seems to be converging. This sounds cold-hearted and against everything that we are taught about responsibility, but in this case your life and health may be in danger, and in stopping you may delay, by way of diverting attention to yourself and the anger against you, the help that the injured need. This problem may have originated during the colonial period when the wealthy settler could cause damage with impunity, offer a few shillings and call it even. But that is only part of it. Just as in the case of the stolen purse, it is just a natural reaction to seek justice here and now, rather than wait for the action of authorities. Every

Much of the weekly shopping in Kenya takes place at the open markets.

African that I talked to felt that he would prudently leave the scene if this situation arose for him.

Buses run regularly although erratically at times. Foreigners do not use the buses; in rush hour they are packed with people. For regular transport to work and back they are not reliable. This is good to keep in mind if an employee is dependent on the bus service. He will certainly be late several times during a week.

Taxis must be telephoned, or obtained at regular taxi stands. They do not cruise. They are not metered; the price must be agreed on beforehand and it is a good idea to find out how much a particular route should cost before you get into the taxi.

SHOPPING

Most basic necessities can be found in Nairobi. Apart from periodic shortages, most fruits, vegetables, meats, and staples such as sugar are available. Some of the shops have fixed prices, especially in the shopping centers frequented by foreigners, but there are many shopping areas where bargaining is the order of the day. You must know how much something is worth, or you will pay too much. Sellers will ask double, even triple what an item is worth. You must examine the item carefully, as they are not opposed to misrepresenting the quality of the article. It is up to you to investigate and protect yourself from getting cheated. Sometimes becoming a regular customer will help you get a fair deal. Some shopkeepers, after they know you, will allow credit, so don't be shy about asking to set up an account.

In all stores, the employee who helps you pick out, prepare, or carry to the car, items that you buy can be tipped 20 to 50 shillings depending on the service rendered.

Shopping will take some time here. There are the butcher, baker, and greengrocer, in addition to the regular self-service store. A few stores have tried to emulate the American supermarket, but the variety and quality of the meats and vegetables are limited. Supplies vary daily, so you may have to search several stores if you are looking for a specific item. Butcher shops offer meat cut in the British style, which is confusing to Americans. But ask them to help you, and you soon learn which cuts to buy.

Don't miss shopping for staples and vegetables in the African markets. Some items like collards, dried fish, and other foods can only be obtained here. And the service is typically quick and courteous, prices lower or the same as in the shops, and the salesperson will often give you extra over the weight you are paying for, out of goodwill.

RESTAURANTS, BEAUTY SHOPS, AND RESTROOMS

These services are very modern in Nairobi and quite similar to those in the West. Waiters in restaurants may be tipped after good service. Ten percent is usually adequate at all but the most exclusive spots. Often service is included in the bill.

It is also customary to tip the employees who wash, cut, and style your hair. Some hair salons require appointments and some will handle walk-ins.

Clean restrooms are sometimes available at the many modern gas stations, but the best public restrooms are found in hotels and restaurants. Many have pay toilets so have plenty of change ready. If there is an attendant present, a small tip can be given. In rural areas, latrines are very common. The government is trying very hard to encourage the routine utilization of latrines; and if at all possible, it would be very helpful if foreigners try to follow this policy as well. You may always stop and ask to use the local restroom.

If you must stop at a private rural home, for this or any other reason, approach the house and say "Hodi" (the equivalent for knocking). If they say "Karibu" (Welcome, come in!), you may go in. If they do not respond, go to another house. Most people will be very gracious.

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

OFFICE EMPLOYEES

Kenyans who work in the office as colleagues or support staff are well educated, and are used to modern philosophies, values, and customs. They are also used to the Western obsession with detail and deadlines. In addition to the important points already mentioned, the single most discussed issue among Kenyan employees, both Asian and African, is their sensitivity to any implication of superiority, whether culturally, racially, or nationally. Kenyans are very proud of their cultural heritage and their present success in developing their country.

Kenyans expect mutual respect in working relationships.

However, the effects of the colonial period have not worn off, and some expatriates still harbor old attitudes. Kenyans no longer feel that they must tolerate these attitudes. They have proven their ability to get things done and to manage their country effectively, and they expect to be treated accordingly. If an employee's work is not satisfactory, he expects to be corrected in private, and in a calm and respectful manner. He will try hard to alter his work in order to meet your needs, but only if the relationship is based on mutual respect. This is important to emphasize to Asian employees who are in supervisory positions, too.

Due to their traditional aversion to confrontation, African employees may never indicate that they feel bad about insensitive treatment, but be assured that the resentment is there, and their work will reflect their attitude. Since in many instances Kenyan employees act as very important liaisons to the Kenyan community, a poor working relationship can seriously undermine efforts toward effective representation. Not only will they be less inclined to help with contacts, but also they may actually harm a potential Kenyan working relationship by communicating somehow to your party your apparent attitude toward Africans. Be firm as an supervisor but on a human level treat them fairly and with respect.

Photograph of a young American child and her Ayah, or nursemaid, in 1954

DOMESTIC EMPLOYEES

For most foreigners who live in Kenya for a short time only, the most sustained and intense relationship they are likely to have with a Kenyan will be with the people employed to work in their home. These will include cooks, "Ayahs" (nursemaids), housewomen, housemen, and gardeners (the terms "houseboy" and "housegirl" are offensive to most Kenyans). Here is an area where cultural differences may be more visible. The people who work in your home may have stronger ties to their villages, and may not be as used to Western ideas, customs, and gadgets as those Kenyans whom you meet on a business and professional level. Yet these are the people that you will have to deal with on a day-to-day basis, and they will probably know you better than any other Kenyan, for better or for worse.

Because of the closeness of the relationship and the involvement of your families, this is likely to be an area in which cultural differences cause the most frustration, distrust, and ill feelings. For many people, just having someone around the house is a big adjustment. It is very much like having a relative move in. The loss of privacy takes some getting used to. Although one may love being freed from the burden of cleaning and cooking, many women feel guilty having someone else doing their work. They also may feel guilty about having black servants. These feelings all result in an ambivalent attitude toward employees, which may cause problems in dealing with them as individuals.

The people who will present themselves to you for employment in your home will be in much need of money. Leave aside your guilt and employ them for a fair wage in the knowledge that you are giving someone employment and thereby probably helping to put the next generation through school and on to better opportunities. Because of the nature of their work, we tend to think of domestic employees as different from other helpers. But they are not; they have labor and minimum wage laws to protect them just as any other worker. It is wise to get a copy of these laws and read them thoroughly so that there will be no misunderstanding between you and your employees as to their rights. The minimum wages are constantly being revised upward in line with inflation, and experienced workers may ask for a higher salary than those less experienced.

It is wise to ask for references and many people hire workers directly from departing Americans. But it is reassuring to know that most Kenyans who work in the home, if treated fairly and with respect, are hard working, honest, and responsible.

Before hiring, sit down and outline your expectations and requirements. Many speak English fluently and are literate, especially the men, so that it is easy to communicate your preferences.

You should be aware of the benefits commonly expected from employers although not required by law. Employees may expect you to provide a bed and other sleeping accessories, such as a blanket. You may be asked for one or two uniforms to be worn while working. Many employees are grateful if you are willing to provide monthly staples such as sugar, tea, soap, and cooking oil. It might help to find out what their previous employer was providing them. Of course, they also appreciate any old clothes or other unwanted items that you are willing to give away. Generosity is part of the traditional community; Kenyans are always willing to share what they have with each other. If you can foster an attitude of sharing when you give these items to your employees, rather than regarding them as "handouts," it will benefit the relationship.

Once hired, there is a three-month probation period during which you and your employees can work out problems. After this period employees are entitled to severance pay of one month or 30 days notice, if fired without probable cause. After this period, a women may not be dismissed for becoming pregnant. She is entitled to two months maternity leave at full pay and then returning to her job as before. If she chooses to keep her baby with her, she and the employer can work out a timetable that permits adequate baby care plus accomplishment of her household tasks.

So this three-month period must be used wisely to determine if the employment is going to work out. This is the time to make clear your expectations, what rules you want followed, and points that you feel strongly about, such as personal cleanliness. Try to discern their working preferences, their limitations, and try to keep a spirit of compromise. For traditional reasons many men and some women will not want to care for the family's undergarments. This kind of working restriction will have to be respected, and usually can be worked around.

While not all domestic cooks dress like this hotel chef, they do mostly distinguish themselves with uniforms.

Some people feel that they must take an authoritarian posture with domestic employees, or they won't be respected. Allowing for individual differences, this is not the case. You will be respected if you treat your employees fairly, and correct them privately, calmly, and with respect. Angry scenes and paternalistic treatment will probably damage the working relationship.

The factor that complicates the working relationship with domestic employees is that their work happens to be your home. This causes a more intense interaction between the business and personal aspects of your relationship. They will be drawn into some private areas of your daily life whether they like it or not. Family disagreements are hard to schedule for the employee's time off. They have to do their jobs while trying to work around your family, friends, and social schedule. Likewise, they will most likely live on your property, which will to some extent involve you in their personal lives. They will want a social life of their own; they may want friends to visit or stay with them. These things should be agreed upon in the beginning. For reasons of security, you may request that they introduce to you anyone they anticipate visiting them regularly. Members of the immediate family are entitled to live with your employee at their discretion, but since their family ties are strong, they may appreciate your willingness for members of the extended family to visit from

time to time, too. Don't worry about cramped quarters. This is something that they will work out. If problems do arise, discuss them, and they can usually be solved.

Most employees are very conscientious about security and will protect your home against unwanted intruders who are just as likely to steal from them as from you. Just make clear your feeling and rules about visitors and they will try to comply if you are reasonable.

The living situation offers opportunities to learn about the lifestyle and the forms of interactions of your employees, if you are interested and are willing to open up and ask questions. They will be pleased to share their culture with you, especially if you are learning Kiswahili. But at the same time, the living situation many times calls for a more skilled and delicate management technique than may be required for office workers. If you keep in mind that everyone needs fairness and a sense of worth for the work that they do, you should have a good working relationship.

It is good to mention here that you will probably have more than one employee in the home: at least one indoor staff member, and a gardener. They must live in very close contact and must work and cooperate together in the running of your household. It is wise to introduce potential employees and try to discern if there are potential problems. Sometimes there are animosities based on ethnic group affiliations; or, since Nairobi is a relatively small town and employees tend to stay within the American community, it is possible that unpleasant past associations will affect their relationship. If there are problems between them, you are bound to become referee and mediator, so it is best to avoid the problems in the first place.

The subject of loans is a difficult one and depends on your financial resources, your relationship with your employee, and your personal thoughts on money management. Low-income Kenyans do not save money as a rule; there simply isn't enough. Their salary must first go toward school fees, family needs, and any that is left over will be given or lent to friends in need, or spent on food and other consumables. Any extra money may be lost or stolen. They do not dwell on the philosophy, they just know that saving is not practical. They will expect or hope that you will be willing to lend money to them in times of need. This is not a form of exploitation; you are not being singled out as a rich source of funds. Lending and borrowing are just part of their life and relationships. The usual reasons given are doctor bills, school fees and uniforms, land purchases, and bus fares home in times of emergency (bus fares home and back during annual leave MUST be paid for by the employer; other times it is considered a loan). Some ask for large amounts, $100 to $200. They are faithful as a rule about paying it back, and will probably borrow again as soon as an old debt is paid off. You usually agree to deduct so much from their monthly salary until the debt is gone. As with all financial transactions, including overtime payments, these debts should be carefully documented with receipts and dated, with the employee's signature. You should consider the possibility that they may get financially bogged down and simply disappear some day owing you money. This very seldom happens, but it is a possibility. So you must decide what your policy toward lending will be and make it clear at the beginning.

It is not uncommon for employers to make a gift of a certain amount of money, usually paid in emergency. To Kenyans, giving gifts is an important form of socializing and is often in the form of money; a friend many times directly asks for the gift. This may arise with your Kenyan friends and you should not take offense if asked for money. Just decide what to do, then tell them how you feel. Employers may follow this custom if they wish and have the financial resources. Most employers of domestic help will pay medical expenses for their servants in case of need, though many routine problems may be treated free at city council or government clinics and hospitals.

CONCLUSION

Nairobi is one of the few posts in the developing world that offers the opportunity to form local friendships with a minimum of communication difficulty. One is free to travel the country, and the variety of learning opportunities makes study of the local cultures both fascinating and painless. Many countries cannot offer this type of growth experience within the local society, and it is a shame to let this opportunity pass without taking advantage of it. Local church and volunteer societies welcome all the help they can get. Many Kenyans are anxious to develop friendships once they are convinced that the offer of friendship is sincere. All that is needed is a genuine interest and a commitment to making the extra effort. The reward is a wonderful experience in personal growth.

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USEFUL KISWAHILI WORDS AND PHRASES

GREETINGS

Hello, how are you?	Jambo
Fine, thank, very well	Jambo sana
How are things with you?	Habari (gani)
Fine. (very fine)	Mzuri (sana)
May I enter?	Kodi!
Please come in.	Karibu

POLITE PHRASES

Excuse me.	Nisamehe; Samahani
Thank you (very much)	Asante (sana)
Please	Tafaihali (can be used to get someone's attention)
Wait a minute.	Ngoja kidogo
I'm sorry for you, too bad	Pole

I'm sorry I can't	Nasikitika, siwezi
I'm called...	Ninaitwa...or Jina langu ni...
I can't eat any more.	Nimeshiba (sana)
Might I go now?	Yafaa niende sasa?

VERBS

Bring to me...	Niletee...or lete hapa
Come here.	Njoo, or njo; hapa
Do it this way.	Fanya hivyo
Give me...	Nipe...
Look out!	Jihadhari! or Angalia!
There isn't any.	Hakuna
Is there any...	Kuna ...
Let's go.	Twende

ADVERBS, et cetera

Yes	Ndiyo
No, not	Siyo or Hapana
Maybe, probably	Labda
Today	Leo
Yesterday	Jana
Tomorrow	Kesho
Now	Sasa
Quickly	Upesi
Slowly	Pole pole
Where	Wapi
How much	Kiasi gani
How many	Ngapi
Good	Nzuri
And	Na
O.K.	Saiva sawa
Left	Kushoto
Right	Kulia

NOUNS

Food	Chakula
Water	Naji
Gas (petrol)	Petroli
Oil	Mafuta
Coffee	Kahawa
Tea	Chai
Milk	Maziwa
Beer	Pombe
Sugar	Sukari
Salt	Chunvi
Guest, stranger	Mgeni
White foreigner	Mzungu
African	Mwafrika
Common man, citizen	Mwananchi
Danger	Hatari
Warning	Onyo
Police Station	Kituo cha polisi
Restroom, latrine	Choo (Choo kiko wapi? Where is the restroom?)
Shilling	Shilingi
Ten cents	Senti kumi, or peni moja
Fifty cents	Senti hamsini, or peni tano, or sumuni
Madam	Mama
Sir	Bwana
Lion	Simba
Elephant	Ndovu
Rhino	Kifaru
Giraffe	Twiga
Zebra	Punda milia

NUMBERS

One	Moja
Two	Mbili
Three	Tatu
Four	Nne
Five	Tano
Six	Sita
Seven	Saba
Eight	Nane
Nine	Tisa
Ten	Kumi
Eleven	Kumi na moja
Twenty	Ishirini
Twenty-one	Ishirini na moja
Thirty	Thelathini
Forty	Arobaini
Fifty	Hamsini

Sixty	Sitini
Seventy	Sabini
Eighty	Themanini
Ninety	Tisaini (tisini)
One Hundred	Mia moja